

## Lea Historical Treasures: A Mary Lou Carson Recollection, A Jim Black Poem, Another Martha Ellis Book

Originally published December 18, 2012, 2012

I've had many visitors remark that walking through the museum's buildings is like exploring a rare and valuable old treasure chest of history.

That certainly is the case with me on a regular basis, but over the last couple of weeks the idea has especially been true as I came across an article about Mary Lou Carson that appeared in the old Hobbs Flair newspaper, a long narrative poem written by Jim Black that appeared in the Lovington Leader, and in yet another book written by Martha "Mettie" Ellis that contains ninety poems about life on the historic Bell Ranch.

The Mary Lou Carson story appeared in the Hobbs Flare in 1985 and contained extensive quotes of Mary Lou remembering the days of her youth growing up in Southeast New Mexico when this was still a frontier region.

She tells stories about some terrifying times that involved screams in the night, horse thieves, and rattlesnakes, but she insists that "all was not bad on the vast flat, treeless prairie in those days. No, definitely all was not bad! There was beauty, there was much neighbor helping neighbor, there was a lot of self-made good times, there was humor, and above all else, there was a deep and abiding faith, and there was hope."

The Flare printed several photographs taken around the Graham place, Graham being Mary Lou's maiden name. But one photo stands out. It is of Mary Lou in 1919 when she was sixteen years old and when she was about as pretty as a sixteen-year-old girl can be.

In the History Notebook I have written many times about Mary Lou Carson and the

Carson and Graham families. Mary Lou's family owned the historic Causey place six miles south of Lovington.

Mary Lou's son Joel, as many readers will already know, has curated and built a beautiful museum exhibit that features the Graham and Carson families. The exhibit is located on the ground floor of the museum's 1918 Commercial Hotel building.

The second historical treasure I recently came across was published in 1967. It is a Sunday edition of the Lovington Daily Leader, and it contains a poem written by Jim Black, a second generation Lea County resident and the father of Lovington's Ross Black.

Now Jim Black was a rancher and was not a man many of his neighbors would have thought of as a poet. But late in his life, he wrote a narrative in a poetic form that simply and vividly tells of his family's life in earlier times. The Blacks came to New Mexico from Texas in 1909.

The following are a few lines from the poem that also later appeared in the first volume of the county genealogy book "Then and Now."

It begins, "I will tell you a story, a story so true, of a worn out ole cowboy, so well known to you."

That cowboy was Jim's father, and Jim ends the 219-line poem with these words:

"This man we speak of, he lived in a shack, in case you have forgotten, his name was Joel D. Black. What I had to say, I hope it did rhyme. We first came to this country, in 1909."

In the middle of the poem, Jim gives the names of his siblings:

“Our family grew large, with the passing of time, mother and dad and children of nine. First there was Addie, Then Nora and Jim, Nickname Fitsimmons beanpole or slim. Next come Joe, blue eyes and fair, Followed by Mamie, no looks could compare. Two years later along came Thad, gentle of nature though, some thought him bad. Ed, Chock and Gail, came right down the line. Six boys, three girls, they all numbered nine.”

Jim wrote many lines about the hardships of the times:

“The month was December, year seventeen, prettiest snow I had ever seen. We were all so sure, the drought was dead, not even suspecting, less than two months ahead, the cowboys would be calling, their cows to be fed. Not knowing that soon, most all would be dead.”

The third historical jewel I came across this past week is in the same genre as Jim Black’s writing.

It is another book by Martha Price Ellis, the author of one of two books that were subjects of the last History Notebook. In addition to “Bell Ranch: Recollections and Memories,” published in 1985, Martha is the author of “Bell Ranch Glimpses” which was published in 1980 and contains ninety poems describing the history of the famous ranch at which her husband George Ellis served as manager for 26 years.

George grew up in Lea County near Crossroads, and he is just one of many Lea County connections to the Bell Ranch. Over the years quite a few county cowboys worked at the Bell, one of the most recent being Phillip Ozborn’s son Zach. Thus, there are many folks in Lea interested in the history of the ranch, several of

them rushing to the museum last week to get copies of the out-of-print books mentioned in last week’s column.

“Bell Ranch Glimpses” is a good looking publication for a number of reasons, including a handsome mesa-and-mountain photograph on the cover, but also for the pen and ink drawings placed throughout the book to accompany various poems.

The drawings are by the well-known Canadian western artist Robert Lougheed, who also did the drawings in Martha Ellis’ other Bell Ranch book.

Martha relates the history of the ranch with groups of poems in sections with these titles: Background; In the Days of the Bell Ranch Incorporated; Indian Times; Spanish Days; In Waddingham’s Time; Red River Valley Company Days; Around Headquarters; and Now and Then.

You don’t have to be a lover of poetry to enjoy these short writings, which have a prose flow to them that can make a reader feel like he is hearing a story from a seasoned storyteller.

Here is an example, a complete poem in three stanzas entitled “Comanche Camp”:

“There’s a camp in the Cow Pass, where the tepee rocks still lie, where they left them, that last, long ago time.

“Did they know, I wonder, as they broke that camp, in the cedars, above the waterhole in the pink-red rocks, that they’d never come back, to this land--this fair, lovely land, with its game and its shelter?

“Where the fat deer bound away, through the trees, and the antelope wheel and circle out on the flats; where catfish laze in the waterholes, along the river, and blue quail rise whirring from

**History Notebook by Jim Harris. Originally published in the Lovington Daily Leader, Lovington, New Mexico**

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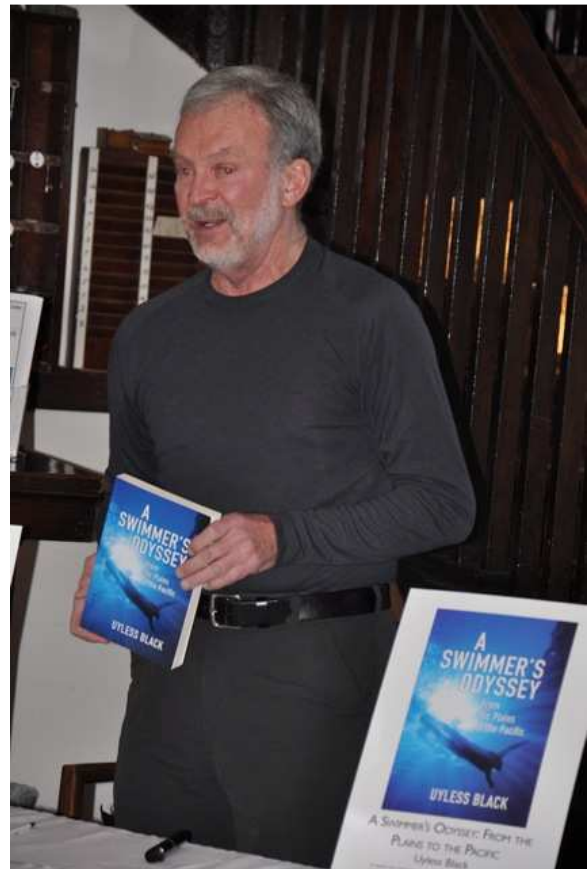
Originally published December 18, 2012, 2012

the brush; where the wind-hewn caves in the , lie warm in the winter sun—with all the valley spread below; where signal fires sent news across a land, that countless men have held—and lost.”

Poetry is not everyone’s cup of tea, but Martha Ellis writes with such strong images of the Bell Ranch that just about anyone can find something to like in the facts and in the emotions she stretches out on the page as Indians might have stretched out in the warmth of a winter sun on a canyon rim.

Visiting the Lea County Museum can be like a treasure hunt for those of us who work at the museum and for those visiting the Archives Room or the museum book store and gift shop.

The Christmas season is a good time to visit the book store and shop to purchase some historical gifts that can be treasured for many seasons to come.



**The distinguished looking writer is Jim Black’s son U.D. Black talking about his book “A Swimmer’s Odyssey” at the Lea County Museum on Nov. 12.**